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SUBJECT: TURKISH MEDIA REACTION
MONDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2009

Media Highlights

Ian Kelly's Statement Receives Prominent Play:

In their Sunday editions, Turkish media gave prominent play to the US reaction (Hurriyet, Aksam, Sabah, Vatan, Taraf, Cumhuriyet). While some papers highlighted the limited US criticism by comparing it with the EU reaction, most papers carried the call for the continuation of the democratization process. Cumhuriyet carried Kelly's full text and noted that the "EU called the closure decision an obstacle" while the US called for "caution." Mainstream Aksam contrasted the EU and the US statements by labeling them "Europe is displeased" and "the US is cautious."

Constitutional Court Bans DTP:

All TV channels interrupted regular Friday evening programming to focus on the Constitutional Court's decision to close the DTP. Saturday's papers used banner headlines and gave extensive front page coverage to the court decision. Saturday's mainstream Hurriyet headlined "The reason for the closure is DTP being the center of terrorist activities" and reported that the unanimous court decision banned 37 party members, including party chair Ahmet Turk and Diyarbakir deputy Aysel Tugluk, from politics for five years. Saturday's leftist Taraf condemned the court decision with a banner headline saying "They divided Turkey in Ankara" and said that "taking the Kurds political rights away will harm the peace process more than the massacre in Tokat." Talking to journalists following the court decision, Ahmet Turk said "Closing parties is not a solution. Problems can be resolved by common wisdom and dialog. We still have hope that sooner or later the peace will win." Saturday's mainstream Sabah headlined the decision as a "Ban for Doves, Freedom for Hawks" and said that the more moderate co-chair of the DTP, Ahmet Turk was punished, and hawkish co-chair Emine Ayna was not touched. Mainstream Haber Turk Saturday headline reads "For Not Having Distance from the PKK, DTP is Closed too", and notes that DTP is the fifth party using the same argument, closed by the Constitutional Court. All papers quoted Constitutional Court President Hasim Kilic as saying "No party has the right to use words or acts which contains terror, violence and pressure." Mainstream Aksam noted that Hasim Kilic said that the ban was based on the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights issued for Spanish separatist party Batasuna. However, Sunday's Taraf quotes Ahmet

Turk as saying "the court decision is political." Sunday's Vatan headline reads "Turkey's Reality" and reports that, less than 24 hours after the closure of his party for its link to PKK, DTP chair Ahmet Turk sent his son to the military to fulfill his compulsory military service.

DTP Close Down Aftermath:

Media outlets treat the events related to the DTP closure aftermath with great concern and report developments under 'breaking news' headlines. The street protests over the weekend in both the southeast and Istanbul as well as counter-reactions from Istanbul locals were the front page headline story in every paper and prominent on television channels. Carrying photos from Diyarbakir and Istanbul, where some local residents went after the protestors, mainstream Aksam calls them "Terrifying Scenes" and mainstream Milliyet reports "Dangerous Mounting of Tension." Islamist Zaman claims "PKK's new strategy is to produce counter-violence." Mainstream Hurriyet reports that Istanbul locals pointed guns at DTP demonstrators: "When DTP supporters began causing material damage to the area and when they crashed a cafe's window where Turkish flag was posted, people in the vicinity began chasing them while some carried guns. A similar reaction occurred also in Mersin." Leftist Taraf identifies "Scenes of Civil War" and nationalist-leftist Cumhuriyet headlines "Great Danger."

Editorial Commentary:

The closure of DTP has become the dominant subject for columnists who mostly agreed that the DTP failed to distance itself from the PKK. Turkey's prominent pundits however call on the government to

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continue with democratization. Enis Berberoglu in mainstream Hurriyet points out the importance of the Kurdish problem stressing that the "DTP is closed but the Kurdish problem continues the same. Opposition parties should bring up suggestions for solution." He also considers three main reasons leading to what he calls "an end" to the Kurdish initiative: "Imprisoned leader Ocalan did not want to give any say to the DTP while the DTP also did not distance itself from the PKK's political captive while the returnees from Iraq came to Turkey as if they were heroes." Semih Idiz in mainstream Milliyet suggests the need for a new social contract by amending the constitution and notes: "Given the current situation, Turkey seems to be in a process of shooting itself in the foot regarding the Kurdish issue." Yasin Aktay in Islamist Yeni Safak thinks the closure of DTP puts the government in a difficult position: "For dismembering the DTP, ruling party support is needed for processing DTP resignations. If AKP does not move forward, it will be put under fire by the opposition. Yet if it does, it may put the country immediately into an election situation." The pundit thinks "continuing with democratization" will be a good way for the government to address the problem. Omer Taspinar in mainstream Sabah writes that the closure of DTP will bring consequences "not only for domestic politics but also for international relations" and he believes Turkey's EU process will be negatively affected.

MHP Rally: Turkey's Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) held a rally in Ankara on Sunday with more than 50,000 supporters to protest the government's approach on the Kurdish initiative. Calling the Kurdish initiative "a project to demolish Turkey," MHP leader Bahceli called on PM Erdogan to "give up on the project as soon as possible" and act with common sense. (Papers)

Call for Constitutional Amendment: Islamist Yeni Safak in an analysis, based on interviews with former members of the high judiciary and several experts, calls for constitutional amendments in order to avoid party closures in the future. The report suggest that there be a revision to the "being a center" wording, which paves the way for party closures, and also that it be made more specific. The report states that the EU style, i.e. Venice criterion, must be the guidance for the Constitutional Court when it comes to evaluating party closure files. These steps need constitutional amendments and action has to be taken by the parliament, Yeni Safak notes.

Human Rights Scorecard:

In a prominent inside story, intellectual/Islamist-oriented Sunday's

Zaman on 12/13 surveyed experts regarding Turkey's human rights record for the year noting "historical gains and upsetting disappointments." Despite gains in religious freedoms, the paper found no decrease in the number of rights violations perpetrated by security forces in 2009, with five people dying while in custody and 33 dying in prison as of Dec. 1. In addition to 252 complaints filed over torture and ill treatment, Sunday's Zaman notes five demonstrators died and 269 were injured as a result of excessive force in 2009, and adds that heavy prison sentences for Kurdish children "is a cause for concern." For women, Sunday's Zaman says there is the added dimension of gender-biased rights violations. In Turkey, where 42 percent of women are targeted by sexual or physical violence, "issues from domestic violence to official and unofficial discrimination, in the workplace and in education, continue to be pressing issues."

FM Davutoglu and His Cabinet:

Mainstream Milliyet's columnist Asli Aydintasbas wrote an analysis of Foreign Minister Davutoglu and his close aides. Speaking with the Foreign Minister, the writer wonders if Turkish Foreign Ministry has sufficient number of experienced diplomats in order to address the changing role of Turkey in the global scene. Answering the question, Davutoglu agrees: "We need more people for sure, as we do not have enough diplomats, experts and ambassadors. The main reason is that the Turkish foreign diplomacy structure originally was not designed for Turkey's active global role." Commenting on Turkey-US

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ties, FM Davutoglu says: "Turkey is no longer a country which tries to respond to American demands. It is now one of the two allies. For years there has been a psychology that America demands and Turkey pays for consequences if it does not accept them. Now everybody accepts that we can be different." According to Davutoglu, Turkish-American relations are getting even better and points out that there were six meetings between President Obama and PM Erdogan during this year alone.

TV News (CNN Turk)

Domestic

- DTP officials are removing the DTP labels from their offices
- DTP activists stage violent protests to denounce the closure of the party
- Coal mine in Bursa is closed for six months after an explosion that killed 19 workers last week
- Budget debates start in parliament on December 10

World

- The Jerusalem Post: "Turkey's hostility towards Israel is a strategic move"
- The detention of around 1200 protestors in Copenhagen over the weekend draws reaction prior to the arrival of heads of state and government at the UN climate change talks
- Italian PM Berlusconi was hit on the face and knocked to the ground after a political rally in Milan
- Four people were injured in clashes with the police in Beirut during protests against the ban of DTP
- Greek deputy FM Dimitris Droutsas says there is no place for today's Turkey in the EU

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